

DOROTHY RABINOWITZ

Specious spy back in the fold

A wayward quest for true love?

Everyone knows by now the outline of the Vitaly Yurchenko saga — set in motion when the defecting KGB official walked away from a Georgetown restaurant.

The result we know, too: calls for investigation into the mishandling of the affair; gloomy estimates of the huge Soviet propaganda coup; the parade of witnesses making representations on the evening news and elsewhere over the "insensitivity" exhibited by the CIA in its dealings with defectors.

(Who would have dreamed that the agency regularly charged with wanton murder, mayhem, and the most brutal conceivable machinations against the peace and safety of humankind would be producing now, in the same accusers, expressions of shock that the CIA lacked "sensitivity"?)

Theories as to the cause of this event abound: that Mr. Yurchenko was a deliberate plant, or that he was simply a mishandled defector, or mixtures of both. None of which provides as sure a key to the otherwise impenetrable mysteries clothing this case as its true cause: namely, that what we have here is a case of unrequited love.

Consider what we know: Mr. Yurchenko was a man in love (with the wife of a Soviet diplomat), a love

spurned promptly on his arrival in the West.

With this information alone, all mystery surrounding this affair is undone, at least for those having some acquaintance with the wayward path love can take when — as happened here — the object of desire, cherished at long distance, is suddenly presented trussed and ready at the door.

Who, then, considering this truth, will fail to imagine the scenario that took place this summer, when the Soviet ambassador's wife found a visitor at her door.

"It's me, Vitaly."

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to tell you I'm getting a divorce at long last."

"Are you out of your mind?"

"I'm yours now, for good."

"Oh, God, no."

Such a soul-shriveling encounter might well have produced the Mr. Yurchenko we saw this week — the Mr. Yurchenko, further, known all too well to his CIA escorts. Here would have been the key which might explain the otherwise inexplicable behavior of agents who sat peaceably back doing nothing to stop Mr. Yurchenko from leaving the restaurant after he announced (so it was reported) that he was going out to "get some fresh air."

The agents' behavior is of course far from mystifying when we consider the state to which months of listening to the brooding Mr. Yurchenko and his ill-fated romance must have reduced them all.

We may imagine, then, a restaurant scenario somewhat different from that reported. In it, the evening began, like most others the agents had known these many weeks, with Vitaly talking and his escorts sinking ever more deeply into their chairs.

"I should have lost weight before I saw her. Maybe I should have gone

to a spa. Maybe I can still go to a spa."

"Why not?"

"Are you saying I was too fat?"

"I can't take this anymore tonight. It's 25 weeks now," one of the agents muttered. Then: "Vitaly, it's a nice night. Why don't you go out and get some fresh air for 15 minutes or so?"

"Wait a minute," his colleague warned. "Let him out alone and he might go right back to the Russians."

"It's a small price to pay."

Thus did Vitaly Yurchenko's brief life in the West begin and end — a sad saga to be sure, but not without its sunny side.

For in all the alarums over this event, the calls for a special prosecutor to investigate the handling of this

case, the brooding in editorials over the lack of secrecy attendant on this operation, we have seen a concern for the security requirements of our Central Intelligence Agency whose depths one had not — one must confess — suspected, particularly not in a week which saw, on the one hand, such heartwarming displays of concern for our intelligence operations and, on the other hand, notably in *The Washington Post*, a front-page emblazoned with the leaked story of a secret CIA operation aimed at Col. Muammar Qaddafi of Libya.

Can we take this as the beginning of a new day for the CIA? If so, can Vitaly Yurchenko be said to have loved, lost, and lied entirely in vain?

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